Command Relationships and Host Nation Security Force Development During Counterinsurgency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Command Relationships and Host Nation Security Force Development During Counterinsurgency

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Thesis: Despite numerous recently published references on executing Host Nation Security Forces (HNSF) development in a counterinsurgency, present doctrine fails to adequately address the chronic C2 problems that have hindered past and present operations and risks U.S. forces repeating past mistakes and failures.

Discussion: After nearly a decade of counterinsurgency operations, the development of Host Nation Security Forces (HNSF) has attracted attention because of its crucial role in successful counterinsurgency campaigns. The military's commitment to improving its capability to train foreign security forces is evidenced by an overwhelming number of new doctrinal publications highlighting HNSF development and counterinsurgency produced over the past five years.

Appropriate command and control (C2) is essential in enabling successful HNSF development during counterinsurgency, yet chronic C2 problems that hindered past operations have not been addressed in recently published doctrine. American experience in the Korean and Vietnam wars included significant HNSF development missions and, in both wars, inappropriate command relationships crippled efforts to develop the HNSF and weakened the overall war strategy. The example of Korea demonstrates that too much pressure from or direct control of an HNSF development mission by American higher headquarters hinders mission effectiveness and allows for disproportionate focus on U.S. operations which stunts HSNF development. Vietnam provides examples of several C2 problems all rooted in a tendency for U.S. forces to be operationally self-focused. This self-focus hinders HNSF development by outright neglect or by warping HNSF development into long-term dependency on the U.S. for support.

Unfortunately, because doctrine has not identified or suggested potential solutions to these chronic C2 problems, present missions to conduct HNSF development in Iraq and Afghanistan are hindered by similar problems.

Conclusion(s): The joint *Counterinsurgency* publication should be modified to more fully address the C2 of HNSF development and provide sufficient warning against the tendency to be U.S.-centric in all aspects of operations. Although current doctrine's failure to adequately address past C2 problems is allowing the mistakes to be repeated today, some relatively short additions to the *Counterinsurgency* publication and related reference publications and manuals would quickly remedy the problem and provide a solid foundation for effective operations in the future.

"Arguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern themselves. The standing up and mentoring of indigenous army and police … is now a key mission of the military as a whole."[1]

- *Secretary of Defense, Kansas State University Landon Lecture, November 2007*

After a decade of counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the development of Host Nation Security Forces (HNSF) has attracted attention due to its crucial role in successful counterinsurgency campaigns. Most notably, the current National Security Strategy states: "Our military will continue strengthening its capacity to partner with foreign counterparts, train and assist security forces, and pursue military-to-military ties with a broad range of governments."[2] Operating with this guidance, the U.S. military is in the midst of improving capacity to train foreign militaries, and an overwhelming number of new doctrinal publications highlighting HNSF development and counterinsurgency have been produced over the past five years. However, quantity alone is not sufficient and masks the fact that present doctrine does not sufficiently address the command and control (C2) challenges unique to HNSF development. Decades of experience, past and present, demonstrate the crucial role of effective C2 in enabling successful HNSF development during counterinsurgency. This same experience also illustrates certain chronic C2 difficulties that have consistently hindered operations and adversely impacted entire counterinsurgency campaigns. Despite numerous recently published references on executing HNSF development in a counterinsurgency, present doctrine fails to adequately

address the topic of C2 during HNSF development and gambles with the possibility that U.S. forces will repeat past mistakes and failures.

HNSF development during counterinsurgency operations is challenging because it involves coordination between units whose cultures, expectations, and priorities are different. Even exceptional achievements by individual advisor teams will only result in frustration, inefficiency, and duplication of efforts if insufficiently coordinated; more dangerously, uncoordinated efforts can result in friendly fire during combined operations and contribute to mission failure. Coordination, or at least implementing the appropriate command relationships to facilitate coordination, is ultimately a responsibility of higher headquarters' C2.

Past Experience: Korea and Vietnam

Past and present U.S. involvement in HNSF development missions shows repeated examples of inadequate command relationships that hindered HNSF development and exacerbated poor strategic goals: organizational structures allowed neglect, inappropriate command relationships prevented the flexibility that advisors require to operate, and bewildering organizational structures resulted in conflicting and changing guidance, grinding progress to a halt. American experience in the Korean and Vietnam Wars included significant HNSF development missions; in both wars, inappropriate command relationships crippled HNSF development efforts and ultimately detracted from the overall war campaign. Unfortunately, such mistakes continue being repeated because doctrine fails to adequately address them. To prevent U.S. forces from parroting mistakes of the past, current joint-doctrine must be enhanced to include C2 lessons learned from others' past mistakes.

Korea

The Korean Military Advisor Group (KMAG) began after WWII as a peacetime training mission controlled by the ambassador and independent of other military forces. The outbreak of the Korean War, however, thrust the KMAG into HNSF development during combat operations.[3] Because the Korean War was characterized primarily by conventional employment of U.S. forces, HNSF development was never treated as essential, and a unique political situation allowed the Army of the Republic of Korea (ROKA) to be under the control of U.S. commanders. The resulting C2 structure granted KMAG Advisors more sway over their Korean counterparts since they advised and spoke on behalf of U.S. higher headquarters. While this command relationship was advantageous for U.S.-controlled operations and helped simplify coordination between ROKA and U.S. forces, benefits came at the cost of HNSF development. Rather than advise, KMAG personnel were expected and pressured to primarily serve as a means for American commanders to control ROKA units.[4] This was a fundamental hindrance against advisors' efforts to develop the ROKA into a force capable of independently defending South Korea.

As a conventional war, command relationships between KMAG, U.S. Commanders, and the ROKA supported the war's campaign design of focusing on U.S. operations, and the overall outcome of the Korean War was minimally impacted by their hindrance of HNSF development. However, similar command relationships in a counterinsurgency would be completely inappropriate and illustrate the tendency of American units to focus on U.S. operations to the detriment of HNSF development. The example of Korea demonstrates a lesson that must be included in current doctrine: too much pressure from or direct control of an HNSF development mission by American higher headquarters hinders mission effectiveness and allows for

disproportionate focus on U.S. operations. To be most effective, those conducting HNSF development need some freedom to work without necessarily being expected to control their counterparts' actions.

Vietnam

Experience with HSNF development in Vietnam is also filled with examples of neglect and detrimentally inappropriate command relationships. During the Vietnam War, HNSF development progressed through two distinct stages, each illustrating different C2 mistakes that reflected the errors observed in Korea and together contributed to the war's failure.

Beginning in 1954 with peacetime foreign military training, the Military Assistance Advisory Group - Vietnam (MAAGV) was initially at the forefront of U.S. military operations in South Vietnam. However, as guerrilla attacks increased, the U.S. military increasingly provided combat support to the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) and, in 1961, established the Military Assistance Command - Vietnam (MACV) to C2 these efforts. While the MAAGV's HNSF development mission remained the main effort until 1965, MAAGV's consolidation into MACV headquarters established a flawed organizational structure that doomed HNSF development's future. While consolidation removed a layer of bureaucracy, simplified coordination, and reduced duplication of effort,[5] it also allowed HNSF development to be ignored: with the appointment of a new MACV commander, strategy shifted, pushing U.S. combat operations to the forefront. Neglect of HNSF development was then compounded: a decision to prevent South Vietnamese units from serving under U.S. commanders created divergent chains of command that hindered advisors from accomplishing their mission and were disastrous for HNSF

development and the war efforts in general. Military historian Robert Ramsey paints a picture of the unhappy results caused by these flawed command relationships:

> "US corps commanders…focused on U.S. combat operations and [neglected] their advisor duties … MACV unit advisors … now had a U.S. operational chain of command and their counterparts had a separate … chain of command. Seldom were the two in synch … combined operations during this period were generally no more than separate U.S. and [Vietnamese] operations conducted in the vicinity of one another … The buildup [of U.S. forces] … caused an inevitable decrease in [advisors'] attention to their primary mission of advising … liaison [became] one of the most demanding requirements"[6]

The second stage of HNSF development occurred after 1968 when the new "Vietnamization" strategy restored it to a primary mission and resulted in increased partnered operations between U.S. and ARVN units.[7] Though emphasis on partnerships ended neglect of HSNF development, these partnered operations were flawed as U.S. forces continued exhibiting a tendency to focus on their own operations, emphasizing tactics demanding heavy U.S. fire support. American higher headquarters again exerted too much control of advisor teams, dictating responsibilities that hindered development of capable, independent HNSF. During this period, advisors were renamed "Combat Assistance Teams"[8] and tasked with a primary mission of "liaison with Free World Forces in combined operations … scheduling, coordinating and employment of Free World provided supporting arms."[9] While different from previous errors, partnered operations during "Vietnamization" ultimately hindered genuine HNSF development because they created a sense of dependency for support. Interviews with ARVN soldiers revealed they "believed that if the ARVN had been allowed to develop more independently and organically, it would have been

a more viable fighting force. 'We became completely dependent upon the U.S. for everything … and that led to our defeat.'"[10] Failure to develop an HNSF capable of enforcing and conducting security operations led to ultimate failure of not just the ARVN, but also the entire U.S. war effort in Vietnam.

Like Korea, examples of several C2 problems demonstrated in Vietnam need to be identified and addressed in current doctrine. In particular, doctrine must address the tendency for U.S. forces to be operationally self-focused, neglecting HNSF development or crippling it by creating dependency on U.S. support. Until doctrine adequately addresses these issues, present operations may repeat the mistakes that hindered HNSF development in Vietnam and ultimately contributed to the counterinsurgency campaign's failure.

Present Experience: Iraq and Afghanistan

Recent efforts at HNSF development during counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan have produced marked progress in the Iraqi and Afghan Security Forces. However, after action reports reveal that errors similar to those made in previous conflicts are being repeated and hindering HNSF development.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the HNSF development mission is tremendous in size and complexity. A three-star general ran the massive Multi-National Security Transition Command - Iraq (MNSTC-I) that was primarily responsible for HNSF development. MNSTC-I had a bewildering organizational eye-chart supervising every aspect of the Iraqi military and police forces, from the Ministry of Defense to individual infantry battalions and police stations. Efforts in Afghanistan are similarly complicated, with an advisor writing: "The current structure … is

best described as confusing, impenetrable, and top-heavy. It is often unclear who is in charge."[11] Having a complex structure is unavoidable given the immense size of the HNSF, but the difficulties can be mitigated by clearly defined command relationships and establishing supported/supporting relationships between advisors and U.S. commanders. However, because higher headquarters has failed to do this, coordination among advisors, HNSF units, and U.S. units has been difficult and counterinsurgency operations have suffered.

The experience of the last Marine Military Transition Teams (MiTTs) in Iraq provides another example of past mistakes being repeated, as poorly defined command relationships hindered advisors' ability to conduct HNSF development and partnered operations focused more on U.S. involvement than HNSF improvements. The last Marine MiTTs were unique: their tour was marked by the withdrawal of the last Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) from Iraq and the experience of very different C2 situations under Marine and Army higher headquarters. Each had divergent strategies towards HNSF development and corresponding expectations for MiTTs' roles.[12] Under Marine control, MiTTs worked directly for the MEF and were adjacent to other U.S. units conducting partnered operation with the Iraqi Army. This relationship provided MiTTs the freedom to accomplish their mission without interference, although they ran the risk of being forgotten as small units within a massive higher headquarters. In contrast, the Army, repeating problems seen in Vietnam and Korea, placed the MiTTs under tactical control of maneuver units conducting partnered operations; MiTTs found themselves pressured to act as liaisons facilitating a goal of conducting partnered operations. A recent after action report notes: focus on the *quantity* of partnered operations "became the litmus test of success … regardless of the operation's effectiveness or if it contributed to developing the Iraqi Army's capabilities."[13]

These examples are not meant to be comprehensive; they illustrate that the C2 problems experienced today are not new problems. Rather they are chronic and have plagued HNSF development and counterinsurgency operations for more than 50 years. Doctrine's failure to identify and address these issues allows them to be repeated.

Recommendation and Conclusions

The C2 issues encountered during past and present HNSF development suggest that current doctrine is lacking in two key areas. First, there is negligible discussion of the C2 of HNSF development. Second, there is insufficient warning of the tendency to be U.S.-centric in operations. Given that these have been chronic problem areas proven to impede HNSF development and to ultimately hurt counterinsurgency campaigns, the continued absence of doctrinal discourse on these issues is inexcusable.

The joint publication *Counterinsurgency* should include a discussion of HNSF development C2 issues: poor coordination between advisor teams and U.S. units caused by higher headquarters neglect, unclear or inappropriate command or supported/supporting relationships, and how inappropriate command relationships can hinder effectiveness in conducting HNSF. Regarding the tendency to be U.S.-centric, *Counterinsurgency* is itself prone to these trends, primarily focusing on early campaign stages, when operations are run by U.S. (and coalition) forces with limited or no HNSF involvement. Since this tendency to focus on U.S. involvement has been so prevalent in the past, the warning must be forceful; to avoid hypocrisy, parts of the publication should be re-written to emphasize the need to maximize HNSF involvement.

Other references dealing with HNSF development should also be amended. The joint publication on advising should supplement its inadequate discussion of a notional command structure to complement the discussion recommended above for *Counterinsurgency*. [14] Additionally, it should include a discussion on the benefits of placing an advisor team as either subordinate or co-equal with a U.S. partnered unit, suggesting principles for how a higher headquarters staff trying to C2 advisor units could best facilitate their success. Finally, the Marine's Corps' *Tentative Manual for Partnering Operations* (currently being revised) should, when re-released, be adopted as joint doctrine. This manual provides clear guidance that would help avoid the mistakes, made during partnered operations in Vietnam and Iraq, which hurt HNSF development by cultivating a sense of dependency.[15]

HNSF development, when used effectively, is a powerful tool within a counterinsurgency campaign. Although current doctrine's failure to adequately address mistakes of the past has allowed repetition of those mistakes in present operations, some relatively short additions to current doctrine could quickly remedy the problem and set a foundation that will prevent these problems in the future and enable successful HNSF development and counterinsurgency campaigns.

Word Count: 2,251

Notes

1. Robert Gates, "Landon Lecture" (lecture, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, November 26, 2007).

2. President of the United States, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, May 2010), 11.

3. Robert Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1985), 46.

4. Robert D. Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, February, 2010), 18.

5. James Lawton Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army: 1950-1972* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1986), 32.

6. Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 35.

7. Collins, *Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army*, 117-119.

8. Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 36.

9. Charles D. Melson and Wanda J. Renfrow, *Marine Advisors with the Vietnamese Marine Corps: Seleced Documents Prepared by the U.S. Marine Advisory Unit* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009), 143-159.

10. Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 102.

11. Daniel Helmer, "Twelve Urgent Steps for the Advisor Mission in Afghanistan," *Military Review* (July-August 2008), 80.

12. 7th IA Division MiTT, "After Action Report: March 2009 to June 2010" (manuscript, Camp Pendleton, CA, July 2010), 6.

13. Ibid., 12-13.

14. Air Land Sea Application Center, *Advising: Multiservice Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Advising Foreign Forces*, MCRP 3-33.8A (Washington, DC: Air Land Sea Application Center, September 2009), 13.

15. Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual For Partnering Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, April 12, 2010), 35-37.

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[1] (Gates 2007)
[2] (President of the United States Mary 2010, 11)
[3] (Sawyer 1985, 46)
[4] (Ramsey February, 2010, 18)
[5] (Collins 1986, 32)
[6] (Ramsey February, 2010, 35)
[7] (Collins 1986, 85, 117-119)
[8] (Ramsey February, 2010, 36)
[9] (Melson and Renfrow 2009, 12,143-159)
[10] (Brigham 2006, 102)
[11] (Helmer July-August 2008, 80)
[12] (7th IA Division MiTT July 2009 to June 2010, 6)
[13] (7th IA Division MiTT July 2009 to June 2010, 12-13)
[14] (Air Land Sea Application Center September 2009, 13)
[15] (Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps April 12, 2010, 35-37)